

MARITIME HERITAGE MINNESOTA

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Andy Gibson Wreck (21-AK-109) Fallen Tree Mitigation Report



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Acknowledgments

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Cover: The fallen tree on the *Andy Gibson* Wreck as discovered on 30 August 2013.

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***Andy Gibson* Wreck (21-AK-109) Fallen Tree Mitigation 2013**

The *Andy Gibson* Wreck site is located in the Headwaters Mississippi River in Aitkin, MN, abandoned at her Potter's Landing mooring by 1894. The site consists of the wreck of the sternwheel steamer *Andy Gibson* that rests on top of a cradle that served as a dry dock. A majority of wreck's starboard side is anchored in place because she is imbedded in the riverbank, although structural components have been damaged or destroyed by river currents, ice, moving obstructions such as trees and logs, and looting. Periodically throughout the 20th Century, the *Andy Gibson* wreck has been exposed during low water conditions and observed by the citizens of Aitkin. MHM has been documenting and monitoring the *Andy Gibson* Wreck since 2008 and over the years we have been anticipating the toppling of a large tree near the stern.



The sternwheel steamer *Andy Gibson* in the 1880s (above).

The large tree near the stern of the *Andy Gibson* Wreck site as it looked in mid-September 2011 during medium water conditions (right).



In 2013, after two floods within a relatively short period time loosened the shoreline matrix at the wreck site, the tree fell into the river and landed on the wreck sometime in the early summer. MHM visited the site for an assessment on 30 August 2013 and discovered the tree fall. The tree created a log jam over the wreck and a significant number of logs and other detritus had already settled on and around the wreck. Aitkin residents Rich and Lorraine Liljenquist visited with MHM at the Mille Lacs Kathio Archaeology Day and discussed the wreck's condition. MHM contacted the City of Aitkin and with the help of the Liljenquists, it was arranged that Bob Nicko, Lon Nicko and Greg Handt of the Aitkin Maintenance Department, Deputy Jon Novotny of the Aitkin County Sheriff's Office, and Adam Stafford and Todd Gretschnann of ASAP Towing, and MHM's Ann Merriman and Christopher Olson would collaborate to raise the tree from the wreck.



MHM discovered the tree fall on 30 August 2013 during low water conditions.



The root ball of the tree remained attached to the root system in the riverbank (left). The wreck's stern outer hull strakes could be seen extending beyond the tree fall as shown by the arrow (above). The photographs were taken on 30 August 2013.

On 1 October 2013 MHM staff entered the water at the wreck site and trimmed branches off the fallen tree that might cause damage to the wreck when it was moved. One large branch impacted the site underwater but fortunately no significant damage was done since the limb was curved and did not go through the wreck into the river bottom. Deputy Novotny and Lon Nicko, in the Sheriff's boat, used a chainsaw to cut the tree into manageable pieces that could be safely towed downriver, away from the wreck site. When only the trees root ball and about 10 feet of it remained in the river, Adam Stafford and Todd Gretschnann of ASAP Towing fastened their chains around the tree and the City of Aitkin backhoe pulled it onto the riverbank. Lastly, MHM dislodged a series of large tree trunks and branches that had caught on the wreck over the summer and sent them further downriver or onto the riverbank. Small branches and other detritus had accumulated on the wreck site upriver of the tree and MHM took time and care to clean this debris from the wreck. Upon inspection, a large bottom hull plank at the stern was damaged by the tree fall but remained in place and a section of the bottom hull planking forward of the stern was dislodged by floating trees caught by the 'tree dam'. MHM moved one bottom hull strake back into place as much as possible but another strake could be put back where it belonged because the river current had undercut the silt it was resting on. MHM placed the strake on top of the wreck, securing it for winter; this section of the wreck will be inspected in 2014 for more damage. Toward the bow, only one floor and its associated metal fasteners was damaged by the 'tree dam' and fortunately, that component is already on the *Andy Gibson* site plan. MHM gathered the broken floor as a sample and it is currently under-going the conservation process. With permission from the Office of the State Archaeologist, MHM will present the conserved artifact to the Aitkin County Historical Society in the future.



The log jam that the tree fall caused on the *Andy Gibson* Wreck during low water conditions on 1 October 2013. The log indicated by the arrow is not part of the wreck site and was removed by MHM.



This collection of small branches was trimmed from the fallen tree prior to its raising. MHM moved all the branches up the riverbank and away from the site. The tree stump is indicated by the arrow.



The fallen tree's stump is still in the riverbank. MHM will assess the stability of the stump in 2014 and determine if it requires removal. Part of the starboard stern portion of the *Andy Gibson* Wreck is imbedded in the bank below and to the east of the stump.



The *Andy Gibson* Wreck site after the removal of the tree looking from the bow toward the stern. The arrow indicates the fallen tree's stump.

Conclusion

The community effort that combined two government agencies, a private company, and MHM to mitigate the damage to the *Andy Gibson* Wreck site by the large fallen tree is impressive and welcomed. The *Andy Gibson* Wreck is a rare example of a Headwaters Mississippi River steamboat and the only wreck of her type with an intact gunwale and deck. Of the four known Mississippi River wrecks in Minnesota, three of them are in Aitkin – *Andy Gibson*, *Swan*, and the Red Mill Wreck – and the fourth is the *J.S.* near Battle Axe Island in Houston County. The 2012 placement of the *Andy Gibson* Wreck site on the National Register of Historic Places is indicative of the nautical archaeological and maritime historical significance of the site. MHM will continue to document the *Andy Gibson* Wreck when funds become available, although yearly assessments of site conditions will occur. MHM's focus on the nautical archaeology of the Headwaters Mississippi River will carry on and with further research, will continue to provide Minnesotans with a rich and fascinating story surrounding late 19th and early 20th Century maritime history, riverine transportation, and waterborne commerce.